GUIDE TO THE MZ2 BAHRAIN FILE

/Bahrain is an independent Arab state or sheikdom which has been a British protectorate since 1861. Physically, Bahrain consists of an archipelago of small low-lying islands situated about half-way down the Persian Gulf. There are five principal islands in the group: Bahrain, which is about 30 miles long by 8 to 10 miles wide, and is the site of the capital city, Manamah; Muharraq, which has two main urban centers, Muharraq and Hedd; Sitra; Nebih Salih; and Umm an-Nasaan. According to a census conducted in 1950, the total population was about 110,000. Over 61 per cent of the population lived in the three towns of Manamah (pop. 39,648), Muharraq, and Hedd; the rest were scattered about in numerous small villages and hamlets concentrated mostly on the largest island, Bahrain (cf. 1: Belgrave, p. 25; 6: Faroughy, p. 95; and 8: Qubain, pp. 269-271).

This is a multi-group society divided primarily on the basis of religion, tribal loyalties, and nationality. Approximately 96 per cent of the population is Muslim, but they are split into two major conflicting sects, Shi'i and Sunni, which coordinate with other variations. The Shi'i are nearly all Baharnah, the original inhabitants of the islands. They are probably of mixed Arab-Persian origins, but they now all speak Arabic and are regarded as Arabs. Although the Shi'i equal or exceed the Sunni in population size, they constitute the poorer and lower classes of society, and are a minority group from the standpoint of power relations. The Sunni are Arabs deriving chiefly from the mainland of Arabia. They have been the majority power group since a Sunni tribe established political dominance over the islands in the 18th century. The Sunni are divided into several communities and tribes. The largest Sunni community is the Huwalah, whose members are townsmen living by trade; but the Utab are the most influential tribe, since it is one of its sub-tribes,

the Khalifah family, which has ruled the islands for almost 200 years (cf. 8: Qubain, pp. 271-272; and 63: Simmons et al., p. 265(A), in the M1 Middle East file).

While Arabic is the national language, most educated Bahrainis and town-dwelling laborers are familiar with English. "In the past Bahrain owed its importance to its position as the centre of the pearl industry of the Persian Gulf; today it is better known for its oil field and refinery" (1: Belgrave, p. 25).

This file consists of eight sources, but it also includes a fair amount of data from sources processed for other files. The early 1950's constitute the temporal focus of the file, with four of the sources providing data pertaining to this time period. The spatial focus is the islands of Bahrain and Muharraq. 1: Belgrave (1953) is a travel guide which includes a good deal of cultural information, making it a useful general introduction to the country. Basic social, economic, demographic, political, and related data are presented in sources no. 3 and 4 issued by the Government of Bahrain. Source no. 3 consists of an analysis of the 1950 census results, while source no. 4 is the annual report for the year Oct. 1952 - Sept. 1953 of the activities of the various government departments such as public health, education, police and judiciary, imports and exports, and so forth. The fourth source falling within the temporal focus is 8: Qubain; this is a very interesting sociological analysis, based on fieldwork in 1952-1953, of social tensions and conflicts based upon religious, political, economic, ethnic, and social class cleavages.

5: Bahrain, Gov. of, which is an administrative report for the years 1926-1937, provides a comparative baseline for a analysis of trends in many sectors of the society.

Finally, there are three historical sources. 6: Faroughy is a general but relatively superficial history of the islands from 750 to 1951. It should be noted that the statistical data in this source are of questionable

reliability, especially those regarding population. 2: Belgrave and 7: Khadduri are more narrowly specialized studies, the first covering events during the period 1521-1602, while the second analyzes the historical and juridical aspects of Iran's claim to the sovereignty of Bahrain./

Processed in 1955.